

Aston, PA—Over the past five years, the cost of earning a college degree has gone up by 40 percent. At the same time, the Alliance for Education estimates that by 2020, 84% of all jobs will require college degrees. This disconnect and the burden it is creating for prospective college students and their families throughout the Delaware Valley was the subject of a meeting held among Presidents and senior officials from nine area colleges and Congressman Joe Sestak (D-PA).

— Under current rates, the average cost of college for low and middle-income students attending community college represents 40% of their family's annual income. For those students attending four-year public colleges and universities, net college costs represent 59% of their family income. Public college costs in Pennsylvania are the fifth highest in the country, with the average annual cost of a public four-year college in Pennsylvania set at \$9,041 compared to \$5,836 nationally; and the average cost of a private four-year college set at \$25,591 in Pennsylvania, compared to \$22,218 for the rest of the country, which is ninth in the nation. Between 2001 and 2005, the cost of tuition at Pennsylvania's flagship public university, Pennsylvania State University, increased by 58 percent.

"Research indicates that a college graduate will earn an average of close to \$1 million more over a lifetime than a comparable high school graduate," Congressman Sestak said. "In the globalized world, having a college education can be key to personal success, and I fear that with the cost of college skyrocketing, students from my District will be priced out of this critical opportunity."

The meeting this morning was hosted by Neumann College, and included representatives of Neumann, Cabrini College, Eastern University, Immaculata University, the Pennsylvania Institute of Technology, Swarthmore College, Villanova University, Widener University, and Valley Forge Christian College. The college representatives expressed appreciation for recent federal legislation designed to address the spiraling costs of a college education and the burden on low and modest income families. They also talked about the need to provide financial incentives to students by offering loans and grants based on such criteria as academic success, retention, and commitment to community service. The College representatives presented the Congressman with a number of proposals to address skyrocketing college costs.

"I had the extraordinary opportunity to listen to some of the most accomplished academicians in Pennsylvania; men and women who truly understand the vital need to make higher education accessible to all of our young people, particularly those struggling to climb up from the lower rungs of the socio-economic ladder," the Congressman said. "It is the responsibility of federal and state government, working closely with the higher education community, to ensure that no child is denied the right to a college education and a brighter future, because of the increasing costs of a college degree."

This meeting held followed a Higher Education and Advanced Training Summit Congressman Sestak held in March, bringing together hundreds of area college representatives, government officials and interested residents to address higher education issues. At the summit, as a special guest, was U.S. House Chairman of the Higher Education Subcommittee, Congressman

Ruben Hinojosa (D-TX).

Recently, with the Congressman as a co-sponsor, the College Cost Reduction and Access Act of 2007 (H.R. 2669) was signed into law last month. The legislation includes phased in reductions to the interest rate charged to student borrowers from 6.8% in 2006 to 3.4% in 2011, saving the average student \$4,400 over the life of the loan. In addition, the legislation provides the single largest increase in college aid since the GI bill, at no new costs to taxpayers. The bill increases the maximum college Pell Grant scholarship by at least \$1,090 over the next five years, while expanding eligibility through needs analysis to include more students with financial need. The legislation also reduces the burden on graduates struggling to repay loans by guaranteeing that they will not be required to pay more than 15% of their discretionary income in loan repayments each year.

"The College Presidents and senior officials agreed to continue to work on addressing the rising cost of higher education, particularly as it pertains to the region. When college costs reach the point that too many of our young people will no longer be able to look to higher education as the key to success, then it is a tragedy for those students, their families, and for our nation," Congressman Sestak concluded.

Born and raised in Delaware County, former 3-star Admiral Joe Sestak served in the Navy for 31 years and now serves as the Representative from the 7th District of Pennsylvania. He led a series of operational commands at sea, including Commander of an aircraft carrier battle group of 30 U.S. and allied ships with over 15,000 sailors and 100 aircraft that conducted operations in Afghanistan and Iraq. After 9/11, Joe was the first Director of "DeepBlue," the Navy's anti-terrorism unit that established strategic and operations policies for the "Global War on Terrorism." He served as President Clinton's Director for Defense Policy at the National Security Council in the White House, and holds a Ph.D. in Political Economy and Government from Harvard University. According to the office of the House Historian, Joe is the highest-ranking former military officer ever elected to the U.S. House of Representatives.